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SUBJECT: KOSOVO WEEKLY: RHETORIC OUTSHINES TROIKA TALKS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Anti-NATO rhetoric and talk of inflicting "injury" in response to a Kosovo unilateral declaration of independence (UDI), in Serbia, eclipsed the first week of talks in Vienna. Tadic and his Democratic Party (DS) remain silent, while Kostunica and his Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) lambaste NATO and supporters of the Ahtisaari plan, as much for their foreign policy aims as for pre-election positioning. The Radicals amplified their usual retrograde messages for the same reason. Senator Inhofe visited Belgrade and supported direct negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina on Kosovo. The Ambassador met with the UN Office director who expressed some optimism that the GOS may become more constructive during the Troika talks. End summary.

PM Attacks NATO, Ahtisaari

¶2. (U) In public statements on August 25, Prime Minister Kostunica for the first time publicly supported his fellow DSS ministers' argument that NATO aims to form a state through an independent Kosovo. Kostunica attacked the Ahtisaari plan for allowing NATO "a role that no military organization has had anywhere in the democratic world." He called the U.S. support for the Ahtisaari Plan "a completely wrong approach" to resolving the situation in Kosovo and said that a compromise solution on Kosovo would be possible if the U.S. abandons its support for the plan. On August 30, Kostunica clarified his position by saying the purpose of the "NATO state" argument was simply to draw attention to Annex XI of the Ahtisaari Plan. The PM invited Serbian media to publish that excerpt of the plan and said the government has "opened a public debate" on NATO's role in Kosovo. The Prime Minister addressed NATO membership briefly, saying that "no government body has discussed" membership, only commitment to join Partnership for Peace.

¶3. (SBU) Holding the government's line against Ahtisaari and his plan, Foreign Minister Jeremic on August 26 walked out of a conference in Bled, Slovenia while Ahtisaari was speaking. He said that he "would be better off spending... time in bilateral talks, rather than listening to Ahtisaari, as his plan is no longer valid as far as we are concerned."

¶4. (U) PM Advisor Aleksandar Simic, who started the recent round of NATO-bashing and suggested that Serbian forces' return to Kosovo, took aim at Slovenia's support for the Ahtisaari plan and Kosovo's independence. Simic said that Slovenia "must not forget that its separatism started an avalanche of separatism in the Former Yugoslavia." Simic added that Slovenia will "not contribute to...stability" if it "wants to violate the international order" as EU president. (Note: Slovenia becomes President in January 2008. End note.)

UDI Response

¶5. (U) Interior Minister (and DSS vice president) Dragan Jovic warned on August 25 of a Kosovar UDI with U.S. support, and that it is imperative that the international community prevent such a move.

He specifically called on EU Envoy Ambassador Ischinger to prevent this "illegal and void act." PM Kostunica also told the press on August 30 that Serbia is preparing a response to a UDI. Kostunica noted that Serbia had averted the danger of a UNSC resolution allowing for Kosovo independence, but that Kosovo's UDI remains a threat. He added that a UDI would "injure Serbia" and, in order to "protect both [Serbia's] integrity and dignity of [its] citizens," Serbia "has to inflict injury, in return."

Troika Meeting Reactions

¶6. (U) Kostunica only briefly addressed the Vienna talks, noting that it was their "quality" that mattered, not duration. Belgrade media reported on the statements by the Troika after the talks, as well as FM Jeremic's public assertion that the Troika agreed to hold direct Belgrade-Pristina talks during the UN General Assembly in September in New York. Kosovo Minister Samardzic said that the GOS team "presented a concept" for Kosovo status resolution and that Serbia would grant Kosovo "greater powers that it had ever had in history."

¶7. (U) Serbian Radical Party (SRS) leader Tomislav Nikolic, however, told the press on August 25 that the SRS "was not invited" to participate in the Serbian negotiating team. He said that Pristina's team includes members of the opposition, but that the GOS leaders "did not want to share responsibility" with the Radicals by including them. Nikolic repeated that the SRS would request the GOS "terminate diplomatic relations" with any state that recognizes Kosovo. Nikolic has repeatedly said that he will resign from politics if Russia does not prevent Kosovo's independence. Nikolic said that "there is always a danger that a state whose territory is being seized from it will enter into war" and said that Serbia would have "the strength to break Kosovo separatism" as long as Tadic is not in charge. On August 30, Nikolic said that he expects no outcome from the Troika talks and that Kosovo will declare

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independence in December and called for Serbia to have a "united front" against such an outcome.

Senator James Inhofe's Visit

¶8. (SBU) Senator Inhofe, visiting Belgrade on August 29, had separate, private meetings (no notetakers) in Belgrade with President Tadic and Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic. He also met with Defense Minister Sutanovac. Following his meetings, the senator and FM Jeremic held a brief press conference in which Jeremic called Senator Inhofe a great friend of Serbia. Jeremic told the press that the two had discussed bilateral relations, and military and economic cooperation. Jeremic thanked Senator Inhofe for his work on helping Serbia access IMET funds. Jeremic also said they had discussed the important role of faith, particularly with regards to Kosovo, and stressed that it was important to reach a compromise solution on Kosovo. Jeremic said that Kosovo is important "in the heart because of Christian heritage and history." In his remarks to the press, Senator Inhofe said it appeared to him that direct negotiations between the parties were necessary to resolve Kosovo. He said he considered both the President and the Foreign Minister as his brethren, and referred to Tadic as a real leader in the region who holds the best interests of Serbia at heart. Inhofe said he intended to try to expand the IMET program for Serbia, which should include a cost sharing mechanism.

Diplomatic Activity

¶9. (SBU) In a meeting with the Ambassador on August 30, the head of the UN Office in Belgrade, Jens Modvig (protect throughout), expressed guarded optimism that the GOS might soften its Kosovo policy during the months ahead. (Note: the UN Office in Belgrade is both a liaison with the UN Secretary-General's office and for UNMIK. The office enjoys good access to senior GOS officials. End note.) Modvig said that Belgrade's leaders "absolutely do not like" a UDI scenario. Modvig said that the leaders here want to avoid the

disruption to their international relations (especially with the EU) and the consequences of radicalizing the electorate in Serbia.

¶10. (U) UK: British Ambassador to Serbia Stephen Wordsworth told B92 on August 25 that Ahtisaari's plan should be implemented if Belgrade and Pristina fail to reach an agreement during the Troika talks. He said he did not understand recent GOS officials' statements accusing NATO of creating a state in Kosovo, saying that NATO only guarantees security in Kosovo and the UN plays a much larger role.

¶11. (U) Netherlands: Dutch Foreign Minister Maxim Verhagen met with PM Kostunica, President Tadic and FM Jeremic on August 29 in Belgrade. In public statements, he supported a compromise solution within international law and the UN. Kostunica and Tadic said that they had told Verhagen that Serbia is ready to find such a solution. Belgrade media widely covered Verhagen's later comments to Dutch radio in which he called Kosovo's partition "acceptable" if both sides agree. Belgrade media noted that Verhagen is the first European FM to publicly support partition.

¶12. (SBU) Comment: Belgrade politicians must decide how to manage Kosovo negotiations while national elections loom within the next 6-8 months. The comments this week both by Kostunica and Nikolic are for domestic consumption and intended to hold political ground going into election season. Both are using the specter of a UDI for this purpose. For yet another week, Tadic and his DS have chosen to remain silent and let others define how Serbia engages with their avowed "strategic imperatives" of NATO and the West.

MUNTER